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Naval Medical Research Center Researcher Travels to Hungary for Annual NATO Chess Tournament

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Lt. Chaselynn Watters, staff scientist in the Wound Infections Department at the Naval Medical Research Center (NMRC), was selected to represent the United States Navy at the 28th annual North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Chess Championship held at the ornate and historic Stefania Palace, Cultural Center of National Defense, Budapest, Hungary, March 26 – April 1, 2017. (Photo provided by Lt. Chaselynn Watters)

"Chess is intellectual gymnastics."

~ Wilhelm Steinitz, First Undisputed World Chess Champion, 1890

SILVER SPRING, Md. – “At these tournaments, my mind is teeming with pawns and little else,” said Lt. Chaselynn Watters, staff scientist in the Wound Infections Department at the Naval Medical Research Center (NMRC). Watters was selected to represent the United States Navy at the 28th annual *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Chess Championship* held at the ornate and historic Stefania Palace, Cultural Center of National Defense, Budapest, Hungary, March 26 – April 1, 2017.

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NATO, composed of 28 countries, was established in 1948 to “safeguard the freedom and security of its members through political and military means,” according to the NATO website. The *NATO Chess Championship* officially began in 1989 in Hammelburg, Germany, and continues to bring military chess players together in different parts of the world to dual in a friendly battle of wits.

The tournament consists of seven rounds, with a time control for each player of 120 minutes. If, by the 40th move, the game was not yet over, 30 minutes are added to the clock, for a total of five hours maximum playing time.

Gifts are typically given from one opponent to another at the beginning of each round, “They range from military memorabilia from the representing country, to food or drink from said country. I don’t know where this tradition started, but I think it fits nicely into the spirit of the tournament which seems to be centered on goodwill and camaraderie amongst our NATO allies,” said Watters. Watters presented his opponents with NMRC items, such as command coins, pens, and ball caps.

While some games end well before the five hour maximum playing time, others draw on. When asked if there was a particularly difficult match at the tournament, he recalled, “My second game of the tournament, I was pitted against a bespectacled chess expert from Luxembourg – we played a positional match which eventually led to an endgame of same colored bishops where I was ahead a pawn. This game turned into the longest game of my life,” said Watters. “I tried to whittle away his time and get him to make a mistake, but his fortress was too tough to break, and he defended for over 200 moves.” Watters’ draw or tie came with a sweet end, as he noted, “It was an excellent fight and we were fast friends after that, checking on each other’s games and standings throughout the tournament, and having nice chats at dinner time.”

“Chess struck a chord with me mainly as a way to make friends and for the intellectual competitive combat. I’ve dabbled in the black and white since age 13, but began regular training and playing in chess tournaments in college.”

Watters learned a lot of his skill from his chess coaches in graduate school: former Women’s World Champion of Chess, Grandmaster Susan Polgar, and former U.S. Champion, Grandmaster Alexander Onischuk. Training with them on a weekly basis and having the opportunity to play with talented international students, according to Watters, has both increased his delight in diversity and his chess playing abilities.

Distinguishing themselves among the 18 nations at the event, the top three placing nations were 1. Germany, 2. Denmark, 3. Poland – the United States placed 8th.

“I was excited to represent the Navy and honored to meet other NATO military chess players, it was humbling to be able to play chess in a city as beautiful as Budapest,” said Watters. He continued, “Overall I didn’t play my best chess, which happens, what matters is that I made some U.S. and NATO military friends, had the opportunity to represent Navy Medicine, and as a plus I played some fighting games.”

Watters ended the tournament with two wins, two loses, and three draws for a total of 3.5/7 points.

Watters, who joined the Navy Medicine Research and Development enterprise in 2013 as an Oak

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Ridge Institute for Science and Education (ORISE) postdoctoral research fellow at Naval Medical Research Unit – San Antonio, later joined the Navy in 2015, and now continues to bring his insight, experience and research skills to NMRC as the Wound Infections Department (WID) continues to find solutions for a variety of wound-related issues to support the health and readiness for the warfighter.

Watters is at the forefront of research being done in the department. The primary mission of WID is to develop and evaluate novel and alternative treatment and prevention strategies for multidrug-resistant wound infections, which have increasingly afflicted U.S. military members injured in combat.

Before flying back to the states, Watters made sure to see the sights in Budapest and take it all in. From his adventures in chess, to seeing Parliament, the Danube, both the Buda and Pest sides of the city, taking a yoga class in Hungarian, and enjoying a night out in a Soviet era housing unit transformed into a shiny modern hangout, he said, “Budapest is dripping with culture on every corner.”

If you find yourself in Budapest in the future, Watters recommends everyone who travels to the city find a street vendor who sells chimney cakes, which are just how they sound – doughy large chimney -shaped pastries, crispy on the outside, tender on the inside, coated with a choice of coconut, walnuts, cinnamon, or chocolate.

“My favorite part of Budapest,” he said with a smile.

For more information on NMRC, visit med.navy.mil/sites/nmrc

For more information on the NATO Chess Tournament, visit natochess.com

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